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TAGS: PHUM PGOV SOCI RS

SUBJECT: FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN ARAP CASE

REF: MOSCOW 3805

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel A. Russell. Reason: 1.4 (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) An Independent Psychiatric Association-composed commission convened by Human Rights Ombudsman Vladimir Lukin now plans to depart for Murmansk August 9, in order to conduct an investigation of the circumstances surrounding the early July institutionalization of United Civic Front (UCF) activist Larissa Arap. August 8 conversations with a commission member, a journalist who has investigated the case, Arap's husband, and the UCF Murmansk Chairwoman suggest that Arap's forcible incarceration could end with a court hearing scheduled for August 10. End summary.

Commission to Fly August 9

¶12. (C) Independent Psychiatric Association (IPA) member Lyubov Vinogradova told the Embassy late afternoon August 8 that IPA President Yuriy Savenko, Dr. Vladimir Prokudin of the IPA, and Vinogradova would travel to Murmansk on August 9, where they would call on the regional Health Committee, then journey directly to Apetity, about 300 kilometers from Murmansk, where United Civic Front (UCF) activist Larissa Arap has been forcibly hospitalized. Commission members planned to meet with both Arap and hospital staff in Apetity, Vinogradova said. On August 10, they planned to be present at a court hearing that had been scheduled in order to re-examine the forcible institutionalization of Arap.

Cautiously Optimistic that
Arap will be Released

¶13. (C) Vinogradova, who is well known to us and is a reliable representative of the psychiatric profession, had been in contact with virtually all parties to the controversy surrounding Arap on August 8, and she was cautiously optimistic that Arap's ordeal could be ended by the weekend. Doctors at the Murmansk Region Psychiatric Hospital in Apetity had told her they did not believe that Arap's hospitalization needed to be continued, and that had indicated that they would recommend at the August 10 hearing that she be treated as an outpatient. Arap's obligations as an outpatient would be to have periodic consultations with a clinic psychiatrist and, perhaps, continue for some time to take some form of medication. Vinogradova described the proposed change in approach by the Apetity staff as a compromise, and she suspected that Arap, once released, would be able to ignore the outpatient regulations completely.

¶14. (C) One complicating factor, according to Vinogradova,

would be the behavior of Arap. She had heard (and Embassy had been told in separate conversations with Arap's husband Dmitriy and UCF Murmansk Chairwoman Yelen Vasileva), that Arap was inclined to resume a hunger strike or otherwise resist the local authorities. Vinogradova, who has considerable experience with Russian psychiatric officialdom, thought such an approach might backfire, and that they might then recommend to the court that she remain institutionalized.

Hospitalization Act of
"Run-of-the-Mill Revenge"

15. (C) August 8 Embassy conversations with Novaya Gazeta journalist Aleksandr Podrabinek, who has written about the Arap case, Vasileva, and Arap's husband Dmitriy, in addition to Consulate St. Petersburg conversations with Roman Chornyi, who accompanied journalists and human rights activists to Apetity after Arap's hospitalization, suggest that:

-- Arap's institutionalization is the product of what Vasileva called "run-of-mill revenge." All interlocutors believe that an "Other Russia" publication expose on treatment in psychiatric hospitals, for which Arap was one of the most colorful sources, triggered the problem.

-- All believe that Arap's hospitalization is a local matter, and that the GOR and the Kremlin have played no role in this tragic affair.

-- Dmitriy, who visited his wife Larissa on August 6, described her as depressed, and he worried that she would have to recover from the traumatic experience away from Murmansk. Dmitriy, Podrabinek, and Vasileva all confirmed that Arap was no longer being forcibly injected, but she was being forced to take "pills." She has no access to television or reading materials, but she has been allowed to receive packages from family members.

-- Vasileva, who has worked with Arap for about six months, described Arap as "quiet, modest, small in stature, but uncompromising on matters of principle." Vasileva had spoken to Arap at length about her first (2004) hospitalization. It occurred, she said, after Arap became Chairwoman of the local Housing Commission and discovered evidence of theft and abuse of authority. Her attempts to address the problems had resulted in threats from her well-connected predecessors. Arap became distraught and sought the help of a doctor. Her suggestions that she was being followed, threatened, and that her telephone calls were being monitored had led the doctor to institutionalize her. Although the media report that she was held for two months before being released; Vasileva said it was closer to six weeks.

Comment

16. (C) Although vacations and organizational problems have slowed the Lukin-convened commission's departure from Moscow, they now plan to depart August 9 for Murmansk and determined to shed light on the circumstances surrounding Arap's institutionalization. We know Savenko and Vinogradova well, and believe that they will conduct a thorough and objective investigation. Vinogradova's cautious optimism in this tragic affair gives cause for hope but, as she has noted, much will depend on the disposition of the Apetity professional staff.

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